COMMUNICATION STUDIES 646

Alternative Media

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Winter, 1997.
Wed. 6 - 9 p.m.

Office Hours: Wed. 3 - 6 p.m. or By Appointment
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COURSE DESCRIPTION and OBJECTIVES

This seminar focuses on the critical theories and practices of alternative media (community radio and video, public access television, minority-interest press, independent film production, the critical arts, community-based computer communications, the tatoo arts and other emergent cultural forms) in the second half of the twentieth century. Generally, alternative media addresses target audiences that are either not well represented or entirely absent from the mainstream. These include the disenfranchised, members of social movement constituency groups, and other emergent cultural/political/social formations. It differs from niche programming or narrowcasting in that it tends to have an explicit emancipatory agenda.

In the nineteen-sixties and seventies when alternative media was at the peak of its popularity, producers often utilized strategies and mediaforms that bypassed the conventional to reach and interact with their intended audiences (pirate radio, the underground press, etc...). In the nineties, with reduced costs, increased access to small-format technologies, and the rapid co-optation of countercultural ideas and practices by the capitalist marketplace, the phenomena of alternative media has almost disappeared from the public sphere. In the context of social and cultural change theories, this course will trace the historical rise and fall of alternative media in the past and consider its future in the global cultural economy.

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. **A 3-page profile of a group (current or historical)** using alternative media to cover a particular subject/ perspective and the related theoretical/methodological issues raised by its performance. What are the social implications? how effectively did it communicate its goals? What are its problems? Did it create a reaction? Did it instigate a social change of any sort? Be prepared to present this profile with examples in class. **(30% of final mark.) Due Date: February 5.**

2. **An alternative media project (individual or group), with an accompanying written component** of at least 5 pages describing the goals of the project, the phases of its implementation, and an evaluation of how well the project met or is meeting your initial objectives. Place the project/ process within an appropriate historical trajectory and theoretical context. Include footnotes and bibliography. **(Project: 35%; Written component: 15% of final mark.) Due Date: March 16, April 2, April 9.**

OR

A topic/project of your choice to be negotiated with me on a case by case basis. **(50% of final mark.) Due Date: April 9.**

3. **Class participation** - including oral **or** written presentation of one class reading. Not everyone will want to do an oral presentation of the content, but be prepared to lead a short critical discussion of the article's central implications for our understanding of alternative media. (3 typed pages.) **(20% of final mark.) (Flexible due dates.)**

EVALUATION CRITERIA :

1. Alternative Media Profile - 30%
2. Essay/Project - 50%
3. Class Participation - 20%

N.B: Please make a photocopy of your assignments before you hand them in, just in case they become misplaced by accident: better safe than sorry.

All papers must be typed and submitted on time. If you have a valid reason for postponing assignment submissions, such as a death in the family or a serious illness, please contact me at my home number and we'll arrange an alternative.

Plagiarized work will result in a failed grade.

READINGS:

There are no purchased textbooks for this course. There will be 2 photocopies of all readings (required and optional) available at the Learning Centre on the third floor of the Bryan Building. It is open between 9 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. daily, except on weekends. Many alternative media books, journals, and media products are also available in the Vanier Library. Paragraphe Bookstore (on Mansfield, corner Sherbrooke), McGill University Bookstore, etc. You might want to spend some time browsing.

Class Themes-Schedule and Required Readings:

January 8. Introduction to each other. Introduction to the course: context, definition and issues relating to alternative media. Course organization.

The following are the themes of the classes with a list of relevant readings. After we complete the theoretical readings, and the other required readings, marked by a "bold bullet" at the beginning of the line, the class can choose which of the remaining readings you would like to do (based on common interests). Students can add or delete non-required readings to the corpus of material for this class. If you find a particularly interesting reading that you would like to share with us, please feel free to bring it in and we'll place a copy of it in the reading box, so that we can read it in the following weeks. You are welcome to do the same with video or film clips, newspaper, zine clippings, music fragments, etc.... which we can watch and talk about in class.

Theoretical Context of the Field

- Rafael Roncagliolo. Notes on "The Alternative," in Nancy Thede and Alain Ambrosi, (eds.) **Video the Changing World.** Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991, p. 206 - 208.

- Raymond Williams. Ch. 7 - Traditions, Institutions, and Formations; Ch. 8 - Dominant, Residual, and Emergent," in **Marxism and Lliterature.** Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 115 - 127.

- Hans Magnus Enzensberger. "Constituents of a Theory of the Media," **The Conscioousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and the Media.** New York:

Seabury Press, 1974.

- Jean Baudrillard. "Requiem for the Media," **For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign.** St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981, p. 164 - 184.

- Peter Lewis (ed.). "Alternative Media in a Contemporary Social and Theoretical Context," in **Alternative Media: Linking Global and Local.** Paris: UNESCO, 1993: 15 - 19.

- Frances J. Berrigan (ed.). "Introduction," **Access**: Some Western Models of Community Media. Paris: UNESCO, 1977.

- John Downing. 1990. "Alternative Media and the Boston Tea Party" in Downing, John et al. **Questioning the Media: a Critical Introduction,** London: Sage Publications, p. 180-191.

- Marc Raboy. "Communication, Politics, and Society: The Case of Popular Media in Quebec," in Janet Wasko and Vincent Mosco (eds.). **Democratic Communications in the Information Age.** Toronto: Garamond Press, 1992, p. 175 - 193.

David Armstrong. **A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America.** Boston: South End Press, 1981, p. 15 - 28; 331 - 342.

The "Challenge for Change" /Fogo Island Process

- Dorothy Hénaut, "The 'Challenge for Change/Societé Nouvelle' Experience" in Nancy Thede and Alain Ambrosi, (eds.) **Video the Changing World.** Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991.

- **Access**. Sample Newsletters from the Challenge for Change Program.

- Janine Marachessault. "Amateur Video and the Challenge for Change," in Janine Marchessault (ed.). **Mirror Machine: Video and Identity.** Toronto: YYZ Books and CRCCII (Cente for Research on Canadian Cultural Industries and Institutions), 1995: 13 - 25.

Ron Burnett, "Video/Film: From Communication to Community," in Nancy Thede and Alain Ambrosi (eds.) **Video the Changing World.** Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991.

Storytelling

Marjorie Beaucage. " Aboriginal Voices: Entitlement Through Storytelling," in Janine Marchessault (ed.). **Mirror Machine: Video and Identity.** Toronto: YYZ Books and CRCCII (Cente for Research on Canadian Cultural Industries and Institutions), 1995: 214 - 226.

Video and Guerilla Television

- Ron Burnett. "Video: The Politics of Culture and Community," in Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg (eds.). **Resolutions: Contemporary Video.** Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 283 - 303.

- Kelly Anderson and Annie Goldson, "Alternating Currents: Alternative Television Inside and Outside of the Academy," **Social Text** No 35, Summer 1993: 56-70.

Douglas Kellner. "Public Access Television and the Struggle for Democracy," in Janet Wasko and Vincent Mosco (eds.). **Democratic Communications in the Information Age.** Toronto: Garamond Press, 1992, p. 100 - 113.

- Deirdre Boyle. ""From Portapak to Camcorder: A Brief History of Guerilla Television," **Journal of Film and Video** 44. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 1992): 67 - 79.

Lina Trudel, "Alternative Television: From Myth to Reality," in Thede and Ambrosi, 1991: 72-83.

Deedee Halleck. Paper Tiger Television: Smashing the Myths of the Information Industry every Week on Public Access Cable.

Radio

- Bertolt Brecht. "Radio as a Means of Communication: A Talk of the Function of Radio (Germany, 1930), Mattelart and Siegelaub (eds.). **Communication and Class Struggle.** Vol. II, p. 169 - 171.

Radio (Community)

Michael J. Cohen. "The First World Conference of Community Oriented Radio

• Broadcasters: August 1983," in **Ear Magazine**. Vol. 8. No. 5. March 1984: 18 - 21.

Abbe Edelson. "Community Radio: Reports on AMARC 2 the Conference. **Fuse**. Fall, 1986: 40 - 44.

• Lorna Roth. "Mohawk Airwaves and Cultural Challenges: Some Reflections on the Politics of Recognition and Cultural Appropriation After the Summer of 1990," **Canadian Journal of Communication**. Vol. 18. No. 3. Summer 1993: 3115 - 331.

• Liora Salter. "The Seven Deadly Sins of Community Programming," **Canadian Journal of Communication.** Vol. 5. No. 2. Fall 1978.

Radio (Pirate)

• Alexander Wilson. "Self-Serve Radio: A Conversation with a Pirate," **Fuse**. March/April 1983, p. 366 -369.

Radio rethink

Chapters from Daina Augaitis and Dan Lander. **Radio rethink: art, sound and transmission.** Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1994:

• Dialogues Between Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Pena. "New World Radio," p. 223 - 242.

Hildegard Westerkamp. "The Soundscape on Radio," p. 87 - 94.

• Tetsuo Kogawa. "Toward Polymorphous Radio," p. 287 - 299.

Rob Kozinuk. "How to Build a One-Watt FM Transmitter Based on a Workshop by Tetsuo Kogawa," p. 301 - 317.

Alternative Press

• John Downing, "The Alternative Public Realm: The Organization of the 1980s Anti-Nuclear Press in West Germany and Britain," **Media, Culture and Society,** Vol. 10, 1988: 163-181.

Michael Schuller. "The Case for a Labour-Based Community Press," in **Canadian Labour**. May, 1985.

Music and Sound Alternatives

Excerpts from: R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson (eds.). **The Sounds of Social Change: Studies in Popular Culture.** New York: Rand McNally & Co., 1972.

R. Sere Denisoff. "The Evolution of the American Protest Song," p. 15 - 25.

Richard Brazier, "The Industrial Workers of the World's 'Little Red Songbook'," p. 60 - 71.

Charles Gillett. "The Black Market Roots of Rock," p. 274 -281.

Internet as Alternative Media

- Tom Athanasiou. "High-Tech Alternativism: The Case of the Community Memory Project," in **Radical Science 16. Radical Science Collective (eds.). Making Waves: The Politics of Communication.** London: Free Association Books, 1985: 37 - 51.

- Mark Giese, 1996. "From ARPAnet to the Internet: A Cultural Clash and Its Implications in Framing the Debate on the Information Superhighway," **Communication and Cyberspace: Social Interaction in an Electronic Environment,** LanceStrate, Ronald Jacobson and Stephanie B. Gibson, eds. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, Inc. : 123-140.

- Ronald Jacobson, 1996. "'Are They Building an Off-Ramp in My Neighborhood?' and Other Questions Concerning Public Interest in and Access to the Information Superhighway," Lance Strate et al: 143-152.

Comics

- Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. 1954.

- Brad Fraser. "Coming Out in the Comics: A Gay Tour Through Four-Colour Fantasyland," **The Body Politic.** July/August 1984.

Tatoo Arts

Beth Seaton. "The Depth Inscribed on Surfaces," **Public[8]** - The Ethics of Enactment. Toronto: Public Access, 1993: 93 - 107.

- V. Vale and Andrea Juno. "Hanky Panky," V. Vale and Andrea Juno (eds.). **Re/Search. Modern Primitives.** Hong Kong: Re/Searach Publications, 137 - 149; "Tatoo Mike," p. 37; "Bill Salmon," 106 - 108.

Reading Schedule:

Readings for January 15.

Readings for January 22.

Readings for January 29.

Readings for February 5.

Readings for February 12. Guest Lecturer

Readings for February 19. Study Week.

Readings for February 26.

Readings for March 5.

Readings for March 12. Guest Lecturer.

Readings for March 19

Readings for March 26.

Readings for April 2.

April 9 - Pot Luck Dinner and Performance of Projects at Lorna's house